

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 2010

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: OTHERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS	MERLINO	REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:
	KENNY	KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
	BELDEN	PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
	STRAINER	TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
	GOODSPEED	TOM CONNORS, AD WORKSHOP
	CONOVER	PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ATTORNEY/ADMINISTRATOR

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR	MCCOY	KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER
		SUPERVISORS GIRARD
		TAYLOR
		THOMAS
		ALICE GREYER, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM, CITY OF GLENS FALLS
		EVELYN WOOD, TOWN OF THURMAN
		THOM RANDALL, <i>ADIRONDACK JOURNAL</i>
		CHARLENE DIRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Merlino called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:51 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kate Johnson, Tourism Director, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson requested to amend the 2010 County budget to decrease estimated revenues and appropriations in the amount of \$72,000 to reflect that matching funds would not be received from New York State in 2010. Mr. Conover asked if expenditures would be decreased accordingly and Ms. Johnson replied affirmatively.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to amend the 2010 County budget as outlined and to forward same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson stated that the Department had completed their budget review session. She noted the Tourism Department budget was based on the occupancy tax collections of two years prior; therefore, she added, the 2011 Tourism Department budget would be based on the amount of occupancy tax collected in 2009, which was \$2,947,320. She explained 10% of the occupancy tax collections (\$294,732) would be reserved for special event funding, 25% of collections (\$736,830) would be distributed to the municipalities and 65% of collections (\$1,915,758) would fund tourism promotion. She continued by saying that of the \$1,915,758, \$50,000 would be allocated to the City of Glens Falls, \$25,000 would be allocated to the Lake

George Visitor's Center and \$50,000 would fund the Special Events Coordinator position. Mr. Belden asked if the Tourism budget had decreased and Ms. Johnson replied affirmatively pointing out that less occupancy tax had been collected in 2009 than 2008 and the amount allocated to the Lake George Visitor's Center had doubled.

Contrary to the ConsultEcon, Inc. report, Ms. Johnson said, which stated that the Tourism Department had grown substantially since the introduction of the occupancy tax, the Department had actually decreased in size by 2.5 employees. She stated she had recommended hiring a part-time summer employee on a temporary basis for four days a week and the salary had been included in the 2011 budget proposal.

Ms. Johnson apprised the Tourism Department had worked with the Information Technology (IT) Department for the last four years on website development and hosting. She announced a decision had been made that it would be beneficial to contract with an outside agency for these services. Peter Girard, Creative Director, displayed an example of a Drupal website and explained that Drupal was a platform that would allow templates to be constructed by programmers which could easily be updated by Tourism Department employees. He further explained that the creation of Drupal templates would significantly decrease the amount of time it took to update or change the information provided on the Tourism website. He added having pre-constructed templates would make the addition of new landing pages easy and efficient. Another benefit of the Drupal platform, Mr. Girard continued, was that it would integrate with social media more efficiently. He advised the IT Department was unfamiliar with Drupal and it would take approximately six months for them on the Drupal platform in order to be capable of constructing the templates. He added that by contracting for the services with a company which was already familiar with the Drupal platform, it would take approximately 6 to 8 weeks to implement the new website format.

Mr. Goodspeed inquired as to how much time the IT Department expended on Tourism Department website activities per month. Mr. Girard responded it was difficult to calculate as the IT Department did not complete work for the Tourism Department on a regular schedule, they did so when time was available. Ms. Johnson noted funds would remain in the budget to cover the expenses of the Help Desk relating to the Tourism Department. Brief discussion ensued.

Regarding the ConsultEcon, Inc. report, Ms. Johnson stated, she had been disappointed with inaccurate statements which had been included in the report pertaining to the Tourism Department. She invited the Committee members to offer their opinions or comments on the report.

Mr. Kenny said he had been disappointed on a number of levels with the report. He listed the statement made in the report, as follows:

- ▶ 'Lake George was a mature tourist destination' to which he agreed and added the County depended on a lot of repeat business, generation after generation;
- ▶ 'Lake George was a highly seasonal destination' and 'Warren County was becoming a four season destination but tourism marketing was so focused on Lake George' to which he advised the two statements contradicted each other;
- ▶ 'A duplication of marketing efforts' to which he disagreed and added the Tourism Department was the only marketing team other than the larger properties which had

- their own marketing teams;
- ▶ 'There is no one organization to take the lead in coordinating new tourists initiatives and strategic planning for the County' to which he replied the representatives of ConsultEcon, Inc. had obviously never attended a Tourism Committee meeting;
- ▶ 'Mixed messages about the County brand position' to which he responded he felt the County's brand was consistent and well known; and
- ▶ 'Lack of strategic plan' to which he reiterated the representatives from ConsultEcon, Inc. had not attended a Tourism Committee meeting to see all the planning involved in tourism promotion.

Mr. Kenny stated he had agreed with the report that there were negative aspects associated with the Exit 18 Visitor's Center. Ms. Johnson noted the Exit 18 Visitor's Center contracted directly with New York State and the Warren County Tourism Department merely displayed materials and distributed brochures on site. Mr. Kenny apprised the employees of the Exit 18 Visitor's Center were not well educated on the area and were sometimes discourteous. He inquired about the possibility of contracting for a website that would contain an availability calendar and allow visitors to book hotel rooms online. Ms. Johnson stated the ability to check availability online was offered to all Warren County properties free of charge; however, she added, only two properties currently participated. She added the Tourism website had links to the properties websites available, as well. Brief discussion ensued.

Mr. Strainer stated that he agreed with the comments made by Mr. Kenny. He added he especially agreed that the employees at the Exit 18 Visitor's Center were sometimes discourteous and added the Center was the first experience for many visitors to the County and needed to be a positive one. He said the ConsultEcon, Inc. report had suggested one unified Chamber of Commerce which he disagreed with, adding that each Town needed their own identity and knew the best way to market their attractions. He said he had disagreed with comments in the report pertaining to service and added if the service received by visitors at the individual properties and attractions was negative, they would not return to the area in the future.

Mr. Goodspeed opined that the Tourism Department did a tremendous job and he agreed there were inaccurate statements in the ConsultEcon, Inc. report. He apprised he had wondered for many years if there was an inherent limitation in government running businesses, such as nursing homes and tourism. He said there were comments in the report pertaining to the ski industry which he agreed with. He stated there was a general perception that the ski industry was misunderstood in Warren County and could be marketed better. He admitted the marketing of the ski industry was moving in the right direction, noting this year was the first time the ski areas had been marketed by name. He advised that from December through mid-April the ski centers attracted the majority of the tourists. He suggested the February Tourism Committee meeting be held at Gore Mountain.

Mr. Conover stated that the ConsultEcon, Inc. report suggestion that the County needed to communicate more with the private sector businesses was valid and he suggested an advisory group should be established. Mr. Kenny responded there had been an advisory committee elected by the community when the occupancy tax legislation was originally enacted. He added that at the onset there had been approximately 14 members and the first couple meetings, 6 or 7 members had attended. He continued that after the first six months only 2 or 3 members

of the committee attended meetings and eventually the committee disbanded. Mr. Merlino noted the purpose of the Tourism Department was to promote the entire County, as opposed to a particular business or property. Brief discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson reported the Travel Guide and the Winter Brochure were currently in production. Pertaining to the Travel Guide, she stated, properties were informed that if updated information was not provided, the information would remain the same as the previous year. She advised the Rafting, Tubing and Canoe Access Site Brochure was currently in production. Ms. Johnson apprised a preliminary meeting had been held with Frank Garofalo, of the City of Glens Falls, pertaining to the possibility of producing a brochure regarding a route that traveled through Warren, Washington, Saratoga and Essex Counties. She added Chairman Monroe had advised the request for support be presented to the Intercounty Legislative Committee of the Adirondacks since multiple counties would be involved.

Ms. Johnson apprised a FAM (familiarization) tour had been taken by representatives from travelroads.com. She circulated the itinerary of the tour for the Committee members to view; *a copy of which is on file with the minutes.* American Road Magazine published an article entitled "Teddy's Wild Ride", she continued, which pertained to Vice President Theodore Roosevelt's 1901 ride along the 40 mile road (currently the section of Route 28N formally named Roosevelt-Marcy Memorial Highway) between Long Lake, New York and North Creek, New York, upon receiving word of the eminent death of President William McKinley; *a copy of the article is on file with the minutes.* She added that since the purpose of Vice President Roosevelt's journey was to reach the train station in North Creek in order to board the train to Buffalo where President McKinley had been shot, the train station and the fact that Warren County had purchased the track in 1998 were mentioned in the article. She advised the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council, the visitadirondacks.com website and phone number were mentioned in the article and she added from June 1, 2010 to the end of September the Warren County Tourism website had 20,000 click-throughs from the visitadirondacks.com website.

Ms. Johnson reported that *Classic Yacht Magazine* had requested images of Lake George which were supplied and were included with the article that had been written for the magazine by Tony Hall, of the *Lake George Mirror*. She said a request for a FAM tour in October had been received from *Auto Week Magazine*.

Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, presented a Group Tour and Meeting/Convention Update; *a copy of which is on file with the minutes.* She advised the 2011 Group Travel Planner was currently in production and 3,500 copies would be delivered by October 22, 2010. She added new itineraries in the Group Tour Planner this year included the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor Tour, the Last of the Mohicans Tour, and the Legacies of Glens Falls Tour. She reported 45 members of the Ohio Hikers Club had visited the area for 5 days and had attended the Adirondack Balloon Festival. Ms. Brand apprised the Regional Online FAM Tour was broadcast annually from the Clinton County Tourism Office; however, she added, on September 22, 2010, this year's Tour was broadcast from the Warren County Tourism Office. She noted that a copy of the Power Point presentation which was part of the Tour was included in the agenda packet; *a copy of same is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Brand reported that she and Ms. Johnson had met with Janet Kennedy, of Lakes to Locks Passage, and representatives from Essex, Clinton and Saratoga Counties Tourism Departments

to discuss possible collaboration on a project with the National Geographic Society to market the Adirondack Region and the Lakes to Locks Passage as a geotourism destination. She added as part of the project a geotourism website and co-operative marketing campaign would be developed. She said examples of attractions in Warren County that would meet the geotourism criteria were the Westbrook Conservation Initiative, the Festival Space on the former Gaslight Village property and the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor.

Ms. Brand advised the Velo Quebec Grand Tour event had been successful with approximately 1,500 riders in attendance. She noted approximately 260 attendees had lodged in area hotels and the majority of the attendees utilized the busses provided by the event to spend the evening in the Village of Lake George. She thanked Supervisor Merlino; Pam Morin, Event Technical Assistance Provider; the Lake George Girl Scout Troop and members of the Class of 2012 for their assistance in unloading approximately 1,500 bicycles on August 8, 2010.

Ms. Brand stated she had attended the Connect Marketplace Show in Louisville, Kentucky on August 12-14, 2010 and had met with Dean Reinke, Event Promoter for Reinke Sports Group. She said Mr. Reinke was interested in incorporating Warren County into his Half Marathon Series in Spring 2011 and would be submitting an application for occupancy tax funding.

Ms. Brand and Ms. Johnson exited the meeting at 11:45 a.m.

Mr. Girard displayed the recent email blasts and news bulletins which had been released for the Committee members. He said three email blasts had been released between August 4, 2010 and September 4, 2010 and during that time the database of subscribers had increased by approximately 5,000. He noted the Fall Brochure had been delivered and the website had been updated for fall. He advised he was in the process of developing a couples landing page for the website. He played the 30 second fall commercial for the Committee members.

Tom Connors, of Ad Workshop, reviewed the summer television advertisement campaign for the Committee members. He noted the response level had increased by 75% compared to 2009. Along with television commercials, he added, all of the stations ran banner advertisements on their websites which had been developed by Mr. Girard. He said the banners allowed people to link directly to a landing page which offered a travel package. He noted 500 people had filled in the required information on the landing page over the summer. Mr. Connors advised there had been a special promotion with Six Flags New England over the summer. He apprised the fall buy was still up and he anticipated doubling the response level compared to 2009. He displayed an example of the smart phone signs displayed throughout Six Flags and reported the majority of the people who accessed the website via their smart phone spent a longer period of time on the website than the average person. He added people also stayed on the website twice as long in order to enter contests. He announced that Six Flags had informed him that Warren County Tourism was the first to advertise via smart phone signs in the parks.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Strainer and seconded by Mr. Goodspeed, Mr. Merlino adjourned the meeting at 11:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist